

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the hepatitis C virus that results in infection of the liver. Hepatitis C is the most common (but not the only) cause of post-blood transfusion hepatitis in the United States.

Who gets hepatitis C?

Anyone can get hepatitis C, but the following people are at high risk of getting the infection:

- IV drug users
- people who received blood transfusions or organ transplants prior to 1992
- dialysis patients
- infants born to infected mothers

There is a lower risk for health care and public safety workers, those who have sex with multiple partners and those having sex with an infected partner.

How is the virus spread?

- The hepatitis C virus is spread by contact with contaminated blood or plasma.
- Contaminated needles and syringes are a source among IV drug users.
- The role of person-to-person contact and sexual activity in the spread of this disease is unclear.
- Hepatitis C virus is **not** spread through casual contact or in typical school, office or food service settings.
- It is **not** spread through the aerosol route, e.g., an infected person coughing or sneezing.
- The virus **cannot** be acquired by drinking out of a glass used by a person infected with hepatitis C.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms of acute hepatitis C may appear within six to nine weeks after exposure. However, they can also occur as soon as two weeks and as long as six months later. People with chronic hepatitis C may not have symptoms for many years.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of acute hepatitis C may include:

- loss of appetite
- stomach pain
- nausea
- vomiting
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes)
- dark urine
- clay-colored bowel movements

Less than 30 percent of those infected will develop acute symptoms of hepatitis C. Most infected people will develop chronic infection. This infection may persist for many years without symptoms, before cirrhosis (liver disease) or liver cancer develops.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

Infected people may spread the virus indefinitely even if they do not experience symptoms.

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

There are several blood tests that can be done to determine if a person is infected with the hepatitis C virus. Usually a second test is necessary to confirm the diagnosis. These tests cannot determine whether the infection is new (acute) or chronic.

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How good is the blood test used by blood donation centers?

The hepatitis C test used by blood donation centers is only a screening test to eliminate hepatitis C virus from the nation's blood and plasma supply. People who test positive on the hepatitis C virus antibody test should consult a doctor and be retested using other types of blood tests.

How can hepatitis C be prevented?

Syringes, tattooing, and acupuncture needles should not be shared or reused. Personal items such as toothbrushes and razors should not be shared. In addition, people who have multiple sexual partners should use condoms each time they have intercourse.

Where can I get more information?

Contact the Southern Nevada Health District's hepatitis C helpline at (702) 759-4636 (INFO).



625 Shadow Lane | P.O. Box 3902
Las Vegas, NV 89127 | 702.759.1000
www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org

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